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B1, 1.4(D)PAGE 01
ACTION WHA-00 CARACA 00476 01 OF 02 202259Z

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EUR-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-00	CAC-00	VCE-00
	AC-01	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OMB-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	T-00	USIE-00	ASDS-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-01	G-00	SAS-00	/006W	

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O 202056Z FEB 03
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9959
INFO WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPLOMATIC POST PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY
USINT HAVANA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000476

TREASURY FOR OASIA/INL - AARON JONES
NSC FOR LLORENS
USCINCSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI - PORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2013
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ASEC, CASC, OAS, VE
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: POLITICAL UPDATE FEBRUARY 20
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PAGE 02 CARACA 00476 01 OF 02 202259Z

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR
REASONS 1.5 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY

1. -- (U) OPPOSITION REPRESENTATIVES ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 19
THAT THEY HAD COLLECTED WELL OVER THE REQUIRED NUMBER OF
SIGNATURES FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT SHORTENING
PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S TERM, AS WELL AS ENOUGH SIGNATURES FOR
RECALL ELECTIONS AGAINST CHAVEZ AND 21 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
DEPUTIES ALIGNED WITH HIS GOVERNMENT.

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-- (U) AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATING THE KILLINGS OF FOUR DISSIDENT SOLDIERS FEBRUARY 15-16 TOLD REPORTERS FEBRUARY 19 THEY HAD RULED OUT POLITICAL MOTIVES FOR THE MURDERS. THEY ALSO SAID A VIOLENT CLASH BETWEEN BOLIVARIAN CIRCLE MEMBERS AND PERSONNEL AT THE CARACAS HOSPITAL WHERE THE SURVIVING VICTIM IS BEING TREATED WAS NOT RELATED TO THE CASE. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION CLAIMS SIGNATURE COLLECTION A SUCCESS

2. (U) REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE DEMOCRATIC COORDINATING COMMITTEE (DCC) ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 19 THEY HAD COLLECTED WELL OVER THE REQUIRED NUMBER OF SIGNATURES FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT SHORTENING PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S TERM. THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CARACA 00476 01 OF 02 202259Z
CONSTITUTION ALLOWS CITIZENS TO INITIATE A REFERENDUM TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION WITH 15% OF THE REGISTERED VOTERS (APPROXIMATELY 1.8 MILLION SIGNATURES). ACCORDING TO SUMATE, THE NGO PROCESSING THE SIGNATURES, THE OPPOSITION COLLECTED 4,426,921. THEY ALSO COLLECTED MORE THAN ENOUGH SIGNATURES TO CONVOKE A REFERENDUM TO REVOKE CHAVEZ'S MANDATE AS ALLOWED BY THE CONSTITUTION. THE OPPOSITION COLLECTED 3,236,320 MORE THAN THE 20% OF REGISTERED VOTERS, OR ROUGHLY 2.4 MILLION PEOPLE REQUIRED. ADDITIONALLY, THE OPPOSITION COLLECTED ENOUGH SIGNATURES FOR RECALL ELECTIONS FOR 21 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES WHO BELONG TO CHAVEZ'S FIFTH REPUBLIC MOVEMENT (MVR). AMONG THEM ARE HARD-LINERS CELIA FLORES, IRIS VALERA, TAREK WILLIAN SAAB, AND LUIS TASCON.

3. (U) MIRANDA GOVERNOR ENRIQUE MENDOZA SPOKE AT THE EVENT ANNOUNCING THE RESULTS OF THE SIGNATURE COLLECTION CAMPAIGN. HE SAID THE OPPOSITION WOULD FIRST LOOK TO THE OAS-SPONSORED NEGOTIATIONS FOR AN ELECTORAL SOLUTION TO VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL CRISIS. THE OPPOSITION WILL GIVE THE NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL MARCH 31 TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT. IF THAT DEADLINE PASSES WITHOUT RESULTS, MENDOZA SAID THE DCC PLANS TO DELIVER THE SIGNATURES FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL ON APRIL 4. THE DCC ALSO PLANS TO DELIVER THE SIGNATURES FOR THE RECALL OF THE 21 MVR DEPUTIES APRIL 4. THE OPPOSITION, MENDOZA SAID, WILL PURSUE THE RECALL OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ IF THE AMENDMENT PROCESS DOES NOT PROSPER.

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AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATING WEEKEND KILLINGS

5. (U) AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATING THE KIDNAPPING, TORTURE, AND KILLINGS OF FOUR DISSIDENT SOLDIERS FEBRUARY 15-16 TOLD REPORTERS FEBRUARY 19 THEY HAD RULED OUT POLITICS AS THE MOTIVE FOR THE MURDERS. CRIMINAL INVESTIGATOR RAUL YEPEZ INFORMED REPORTERS FEBRUARY 19 THAT THREE VENEZUELAN SOLDIERS AND THE TWO WOMEN WERE TAKEN FROM THE PLAZA FRANCIA THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 15, AND FOUR OF THE FIVE VICTIMS WERE FOUND DEAD OUTSIDE OF CARACAS FEBRUARY 17 AND 18. THE SURVIVING VICTIM, WHO AUTHORITIES CONSIDER A WITNESS TO THE MURDERS, IS BEING TREATED AT A HOSPITAL IN CARACAS. ACCORDING TO YEPEZ, THE VIOLENT CLASH AT THAT HOSPITAL FEBRUARY 18 INVOLVING

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PTQ2354

PAGE 01 CARACA 00476 02 OF 02 202300Z
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	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-01	G-00	SAS-00	/006W	

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BOLIVARIAN CIRCLE MEMBERS, HOSPITAL PERSONNEL AND POLICE WAS NOT RELATED TO THE MURDER CASE OR THE WOMAN BEING TREATED THERE.

6. (U) DISSIDENT GENERALS ENRIQUE MEDINA GOMEZ AND NESTOR GONZALEZ GONZALEZ HAVE ACCUSED THE GOV AND ITS SUPPORTERS OF COMMITTING THE CRIMES, NOTING THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED CONSTANT THREATS FROM PRESIDENT CHAVEZ SINCE OCTOBER 2002 WHEN THEY PROCLAIMED THEMSELVES IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. THE LAWYER FOR THE DISSIDENT OFFICERS TOLD REPORTERS HE BELIEVES THIS CASE IS RELATED TO THE SHOOTINGS IN PLAZA FRANCIA DECEMBER 6 BECAUSE ONE OF THIS WEEKEND'S VICTIMS WAS INJURED DURING THE SHOOTING AND ANOTHER WAS A WITNESS. MEDIA OUTLETS IN VENEZUELA HAVE REPUBLISHED THE FEBRUARY 19 PRESS RELEASE FROM HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH CALLING ON THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT TO "CARRY OUT A THOROUGH AND IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION" INTO THE CASE AND "GUARANTEE THE SAFETY OF THE REPORTED WITNESS TO THE KILLINGS."

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